

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

A SMALL HERONRY AT LAKE JIPE, TSAVO

Peter Lack

Recently there has been a small active heronry at Lake Jipe in the south-west of Tsavo National Park (West). I do not know when it was first occupied but the National Parks' boatman evidently did not know about it on my visit on 28 March 1976. The colony is situated on a swampy reed island in the middle of the lake, and is almost impossible to penetrate. As a result, no count of nests was possible. The whole island measures about 150 m square and birds only appear to be occupying one end. The total number of pairs involved (at least on my two visits) was certainly not greater than 50, and probably considerably less. Details of my two visits follow.

31 July 1976 (with Tim Morgan and Rosemary Cockerill):

Phalacrocorax africanus Long-tailed Cormorant, several large young; also one nest with three small chicks was certainly this species, and one with three eggs and another with four very small chicks were probably so.

Ardea melanocephala Black-headed Heron, two large young present.

Egretta garzetta Little Egret, *Platalea alba* African Spoonbill and

Threskiornis aethiopicus Sacred Ibis: a few large young of all three.

Also on the island close to the colony were a few adult Cattle Egrets *Ardeola ibis* and one adult Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*.

26 December 1976 (with Dieter Schmidl):

There were several large young of the Long-tailed Cormorant and Black-headed Heron. Also, there were a few large young Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea* and Sacred Ibises.

Most of these species normally nest in trees; indeed, only the Purple Heron and Long-tailed Cormorant habitually nest in reed beds though this habit is known for the others.

On 31 July 1976 we also checked from the air the trees around the southern half of the lake away from human habitation, and there was no sign of a colony. The trees there are rather scattered and fairly accessible, so a colony would probably be disturbed before it became established. Presumably it is the lack of suitable trees which made the tree-nesters use the island site instead.

There are one or two other potential colonists. Notable among these, though both also prefer to nest in trees, are the Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, of which there is usually a flock of 200-300 in the reeds near the eastern shore, and the Black Heron. Lake Jipe is one of the few places in Kenya where one has a good chance of seeing this species, and I have seen it on all my seven visits over the last two years.

Both my visits to the island appeared to be near the end of a breeding cycle, and it would be interesting to know the seasonality, if any, at this site and, more particularly, if the colony grows any larger.

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